

Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control
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The Book Vendor Perspective
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First, I'd like to say thank you for the chance to speak before this group. It's an honor for me to be here, and I know I speak for the entire vendor community in saying that we appreciate being acknowledged in this way as participants in the enterprise of bibliographic control.

It's a role we vendors play that has not, in fact, always been fully acknowledged in the larger bibliographic world. The scale on which we operate here might surprise some people. The company I work for, Coutts Information Services, is the smallest of the three largest companies who supply English-language books to academic libraries in North America. Even so, I would be fairly certain that Coutts employs more degreed catalogers than all but a handful of libraries in the United States and Canada. In 2007, we'll provide about 280,000 cataloging records of one sort or another to our customers in these two countries.

That will be more than double the number we provided in 2004, which is in part a measure of the growth in demand by libraries for cataloging provided by book vendors. This demand shows in the 2006 report of the Library of Congress's CIP Review Group, which found that among the 1,865 libraries responding to their survey, nearly 63 percent obtained records from a book vendor.

Some 80 to 90 percent of the English-language records that book vendors provide are derived from national copy, which says a lot about how important to us Library of Congress cataloging records are, especially those from the CIP program. Book vendors would like to see more publishers brought into the CIP program. We would like the program to be as timely and the data to be as accurate as possible.

We have read the CIP Survey report and so are aware that that program is under pressure. So are publishers. One very large publisher said to me that they devote one FTE staff position to the

CIP program, “the highest turnover position in the company,” I was told, where this job is considered manual and labor-intensive. Only recently has this publisher begun to test ONIX feeds with the Library of Congress. Perhaps LC, or a sub-contractor to LC, could work more closely with publishers than is possible now to make the CIP program more efficient all around.

What libraries get from vendor-provided records turns out to be more than cataloging. Before our records begin to serve that purpose, that is, well ahead of any library patron laying eyes on them in search results, these records are a vital route for many new books to have made their way into the world at all. These records do duty as a new book alerting mechanism from vendor systems which often are constructed from a base of cataloging records, and so provide librarians with a selection device. They then provide libraries a platform on which to build an order record, and then to receive and to pay for those orders, and then to print a spine label so that a book is shelved in the right location. Only at that point can a library give over a book to the users who might discover it through an OPAC.

A MARC cataloging record, then, during this phase of a book’s life, is much more a transaction vehicle, supporting intricate workflows binding library and vendor together, than it is a discovery vehicle. These workflows were designed, or more accurately, redesigned, because libraries are under pressure too. Many libraries have been able to take on many of the challenges presented by the digital world in part because their book vendor has taken on for them much of the manual repetitive work of selection, acquisitions, and cataloging.

While preparing for today’s session, this catalog from Chicago Review Press reached me in the mail. I glanced through it one lunchtime. Their lead title, forthcoming in February 2008, is called *The Third Coast*. It’s about the Great Lakes. Here’s some of what the catalog says:

“Is there a Great Lakes culture, and if so, what is it?” The Great Lakes have always been lumped in with the Midwest, but the region has a culture that transcends the border between the United States and Canada. United by a love of encased meats, hockey, beer, snowmobiling, deer hunting, and classic rock power ballads, the folks in Detroit have more in common with Windsor, Ontario than Wichita, Kansas.”

So, what do you think? “Great Lakes Region (North America)—Social Life and Customs?” I guess that would help, but other kinds of metadata that capture the flavor as well as the subject of a book like this one might seem in order here, to help some readers find it

and choose it, and others to avoid it. Again, perhaps the Library of Congress could find ways to work more closely than is possible now with publishers, who due to dollars and cents alone are usually quite attuned to the metadata requirements of, say, Amazon, to make the non-traditional elements of what many readers would consider "bibliographic description," thanks to online booksellers, more routinely available to libraries through traditional cataloging channels.

We know that some of the largest questions before this group have to do with what depth of cataloging, especially subject cataloging, should be supported in the future. On that question we'll offer no opinion, other than to say that perhaps at the early stages of a book's life, at least, traditional cataloging requirements might be relaxed somewhat, in favor of this marketing role that records play for vendors and libraries, and for many users too.

The CIP report concluded that the Library of Congress might need to share the work of the program with partners, mentioning libraries in particular. Could book vendors share in this work, perhaps freeing LC to take on other challenges? The Library of Congress estimates its costs to catalog a CIP book, including overheads, at \$130. Yet the current price list for LC cataloging products shows that a year's subscription to the "Books English" MARC file, which includes about 175,000 new records, is \$10,540, or some six cents per record. Yes, it's possible that vendors could become fuller partners in the enterprise of bibliographic control. But, the economics would certainly have to change.

Actually, it wouldn't be a new thing in the world at all for book vendors to be recognized as a cataloging partner of libraries. For years, of course, vendors have provided upgraded CIP records to OCLC. And, Italian books at the Library of Congress are cataloged by Casalini Libri now. I spoke to our Casalini colleagues, who had these things to say about their experience. First, they would like this relationship to be more stable. It is difficult to plan and budget for the year ahead, they say, when an arrangement of several years standing is still considered a "pilot project." Then, they wish the library community they serve would agree on standards that would remain as consistent as possible, so that the company could more readily maintain a staff trained to catalog to a certain level. Finally, they raise questions about the economics of an arrangement whereby LC and a few other libraries who obtain their cataloging direct from Casalini sometimes pay a relatively high price for records that are obtained by other libraries, through cooperative arrangements, at no direct cost. Those are points any vendor would raise, I am sure.

I would like to thank my vendor, librarian, and publisher colleagues who helped with their advice as I prepared for this meeting. And, I would like to

thank the members of the Working Group for the opportunity to say all of these things, on behalf of all book vendors, today at the Library of Congress.